

Librarianship : A Challenging Profession

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When one thinks of librarianship the immediate notion that comes to mind may be that of the store of conventional books, housed in a building and librarians looking after them, and finally lending them to users, with strict adherence to the rules and regulations framed for the purpose. Also there may be people to speak of a different library experience where librarians are more knowledgeable, hardworking and technically competent to match the readers with the right books and information most efficiently. The second species is rarer than the first and it must be one reason for the public to consider librarianship with less approval and understanding. To many it consists of nothing more than the techniques of store keeping and distribution of goods. This misconception has seriously stood in the path of professional development and prevented its bearing of the best fruits for the benefit of the society. For those who still stick on to that concept V.P. Joy's recommendations come as a disturbing reform.

1. Nature of the Profession:

Librarianship may be described in simpler terms as the art and science of managing libraries. The ultimate objective is to make accesible the recorded human thought for use. In early days, when the recorded sources of information were limited in number, scholars could be the users as well as managers of libraries. But, today's libraries with torrents of information sources and users on either sides make manage-

ment a truly challenging task requiring highly specialised knowledge and training in the sophisticated techniques of information management.

2. Foundataions of Librarianship:

The role of librarian is more clearly understood when it is examined in its proper context of communication. Communication is most essential to social progress. It is a sharing process where information from the source of its origin is taken to its target users. This information transfer process is not direct and simple, but involves a variety of agencies, components and channels, each of which is influenced by many factors and constraints. Authors, publishers, librarians, information scientists, teachers and many others are part of this information chain. Library's place very prominently emerges as an information system to create an interface between the users and their information. The role of librarian is that of a filter interposed between the users and information sources, both presenting problems characteristic of their changing nature and increasing complexities.

3. Complexities of Work

In the new perspective, librarianship and information science are closely interlinked and interdependent, but the trust in librarianship is on recorded information. Developments in media today has tremendously enlarged the scope of information sources to include both conventional and non-conventional information packages, proliferating in large numbers and variety to match with the magnitude of information production. Complexity is further enhanced by the increasing population of users, diversity and specificity of their information needs, changing interrelationships among the subjects, escalating cost of information sources, and the financial crunch experienced by libraries. Geographical and linguistic dispersion of information sources make it imperative to seek help from computer and communication technology for effective management of libraries.

4. Nature of Work

The essential role of librarian being an intermediary between the producer of information and consumer of information he is not professionally expected to interact with knowledge in the style a subject expert does but to handle the products of information. It is very often referred to as information handling or document handling. His work involves a variety of tasks such as identification, location, acquisition, storage, organisation, retrieval and dissemination, repackaging and distribution of document/information to the users.

Knowledge of the subject held and its developing trends is helpful to this work but its reorientation to the job is very essential. This is built up through suitable training programme.

Broadly speaking there are three types of work:

- * clerical activities of a routine nature,
- * professional skills of a specialised nature for organizing the information sources and services,
- * management skills.

5. Intellectual Content and Instructional Role

Libraries are open and artificial systems of information. They are created, controlled, and utilised by mankind and subjected to modifications in response to changing social needs. Artificiality is an inherent feature which makes it not readily acceptable to users. This is more obvious in some areas, particularly the physical and technical organisation of the collection and services. Organisation of the collection is highly logical and technical though it appears to be the product of simple commonsense. In fact, its tools and procedures are complex and developed from philosophical, mathematical and behavioral grounds. It bears close relationship with linguistics, psychology, sociology, etc. and cannot be studied in isolation from its broad base of communication science.

In order to interface the users and information the librarians should have a clear understanding of both the phases.

Knowing closely each information source is a very strenuous job demanding aptitude as well as specialised training. Identification of suitable documents for collection building requires on his part familiarity with the subject field, alertness and ability to scan regularly the related literature and every day decision-making as to the best choices for the library. This is to be supported and enriched through healthy interaction with users, experts, management, fellow-librarians, and trade channels.

Organising documents in the collection for retrieval of information is a higher level of intellectual work. It involves analysis of the subject content of each item and preparation of various types of indexes as quick and easy retrieval devices. These devices are based on languages governed by specific rules formulated for the purpose.

Librarianship from earlier times has taken guidance from the epistemological approaches of philosophers and latter from systematic approaches of scientists but they could not provide solutions to problems implied in physical and linear arrangement of documents and information. Indexing techniques including classification and cataloging are used to prepare devices of communication to link authors' texts with user' needs. This matching is very difficult to be achieved in its ideal form. As the nature of information sources and users undergoes changes the indexing techniques are modified and sharpened through research and testing. This necessitates readjustments in use-patterns.

The present era of librarianship has taken further guidance from computer and communication technology. It is characterised by ultra-modern equipments and procedure in information storage, processing and retrieval. They are essential to the successful storage of voluminous information and its fast processing, repackaging, dissemination and distribution beyond spatial and social constraints. Computer and communication technology have brought to existence increasing number of vast information storages called 'data bases' and networks

to link them. This carries further implications to the knowledge and specialised skills to be acquired by a librarian.

The effectiveness of a library is ultimately measured by user satisfaction. Librarian's knowledge of behavioral sciences is very important in understanding and analysing the user needs and finding suitable answers to them. He should be prepared and equipped to go beyond his library to other resources, centers and even individuals to tap the required information. Quite often he has to prove himself as a generalist as well as specialist.

The library system with its artificiality and technical complexity is not self-evident to the users. It needs to be introduced and interpreted for better exploitation. Here comes role of the librarian in interpreting the library and the world of information sources which is important to all categories of users but it has special relevance to the context of education. It must begin from school and progress through higher tiers of education and mould the informational skills of each person enabling him to seek, identify and locate his information. It complements the learning skills acquired through the system of education. In the library, it starts with initiating the user to the library, teaching him the right way of expressing his information need and using the information sources and services with associated retrieval devices. It helps him possess an organised picture of the structure of his subject field as represented by information sources and their interrelationships. It is with this insight a researcher has to proceed in his pursuit of the unknown. This carries greater implications to the training and motivation for librarianship.

There is a wrong impression that anybody can be a librarian. A librarian to be effective, needs special aptitudes and training. He should be intelligent and hardworking, have a logical mind, and enjoy the process of updating his knowledge and skills every moment. Of greater importance is his mental discipline and patience to master the specialised skills and apply them with confidence and compassion to the users.

Managing the recorded information is no an easy job, but is interesting and challenging if the nature of the work and its value to the end-users are properly understood.

6. Professional Development

The transition from traditional librarianship to modern information management in libraries has been supported by various programmes to strengthen the profession. The intellectual content of Library and Information Science courses and their specialised nature have been advancing considerably. Faster changes brought by information technology necessitated continuing education programmes for librarians. The growth of the profession is also indicated well by published literature, professional organisations, standardisation of activities, conferences and workshops, and greater interaction with the computer and communication sectors. The structural changes in the profession continue to carry many more implications to its development.

7. Proper Understanding

The development of the profession for the benefit of the users is very much dependent on a proper understanding of the role of librarian in the new perspective by everybody concerned with information for development. The recommendations of V.P. Joy are based on a correct understanding of the role of information services in higher education and if implemented can boost the quality and utility of higher education.

References

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